

# PETERSBURG



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**NATIONAL MILITARY PARK**  
**VIRGINIA**



*Ulysses Simpson Grant. Wartime photograph.  
Courtesy Signal Corps, U. S. Army.*

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### THE COVER

The painting reproduced on the cover is a part of the mural, "Winter," by the French artist Charles Hoffbauer, in the Confederate Memorial Institute—Battle Abbey, Richmond, Va. M. Hoffbauer began the Battle Abbey series of Confederate murals in 1913, was recalled to France for service during the World War, and at its conclusion returned and finished the paintings in 1920. Throughout the course of his work, the artist engaged in careful and exhaustive research. The cover subject, copyrighted by the Confederate Memorial Institute, has been made available through the courtesy of the institute.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

HAROLD L. IKES, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE · NEWTON B. DRURY, *Director*

# PETERSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY PARK



GRANT AND LEE met in a last bitter conflict in 1864-65 at Petersburg, Va., which, through force of circumstances, became the final citadel of the Southern Confederacy. Situated in rolling country on the south bank of the Appomattox River, 20 miles south of Richmond, Petersburg was an important railroad junction through which the raw materials and food supplies from the Deep South had to pass en route to the Confederate capital. The defense of Richmond depended upon the safety of Petersburg; and when, after a siege of 10 months, Petersburg fell, the fall of Richmond immediately followed.

The siege of Petersburg, by reason of the wide extent of the struggle, the stubborn courage and resourcefulness of the contestants, and the able leadership displayed by the Union and Confederate officers, is worthy to be ranked with such sieges as those of Constantinople, Sevastopol, Port Arthur, and Verdun. As at Sevastopol and Verdun, the siege was not a complete investment, but rather an attack by siege methods on an entrenched sector, while more or less open warfare prevailed on other sectors. The effective employment of earthwork entrenchments by both Grant and Lee at Petersburg made this campaign of particular interest and value to military students.

In the first years of the war the prestige of the Confederate States mounted steadily higher as victory after victory was won by Southern arms. But this rising tide of success reached its full height at Gettysburg in July 1863, then turned, and by the end of that year Confederate fortunes were ebbing fast. By the end of 1863 the whole of the Mississippi Valley and most of the West were in Federal hands. Chattanooga had fallen, and practically all Confederate seaports had been sealed by naval blockade. Furthermore, the two main armies of the South were now both on the defensive. One Army under Gen. Joseph E. Johnston was at Dalton, Ga., to which it had retreated after the Battle of Mis-

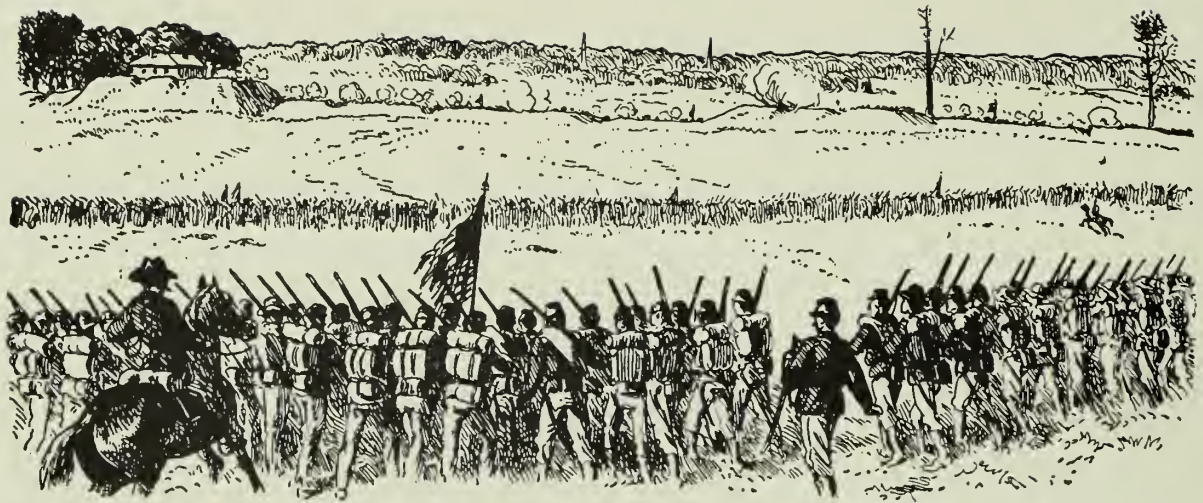
sionary Ridge, and Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia was in winter quarters on the Rapidan.

In February 1864, when Ulysses S. Grant became general in chief of all the Union armies, he determined to exert every effort to destroy Lee's army. With this purpose in mind, he took the field with Gen. George G. Meade's Army of the Potomac, crossed the Rapidan, and met Lee in the Wilderness, May 5-6, 1864. Following this battle, which ended in a draw, Grant moved to the southeast toward Spotsylvania Courthouse, where be-

*Robert Edward Lee. Courtesy Confederate Museum,  
Richmond, Va.*







*The Federal Charge on the first day of the attack on Petersburg. From an etching by Edwin Forbes.*

tween May 8 and 21 he pitted his troops against Lee in a grim series of engagements. Meanwhile, the Federal Army of the James, under Gen. Benjamin F. Butler, had advanced from the southeast to strike directly at Richmond. Butler, however, soon allowed himself to be “bottled up” by the Confederates at Bermuda Hundred, a narrow neck of land formed by the great bend of the James River between Richmond and Petersburg.

Resuming his southward march after Spotsylvania Courthouse, Grant was outmaneuvered by Lee at the North Anna River; at Cold Harbor, June 3, 7 miles northeast of Richmond, he met the severest repulse he had experienced in the campaign. Thus far the operations against Lee had gained little and had cost the Federals a casualty for almost every Confederate opposing them. Grant had pushed forward until he was on the outskirts of the Confederate capital, but he had not yet achieved his objective—the destruction of the Army of Northern Virginia. Convinced by the repulse at Cold Harbor that it would be futile to try again to overcome this army in the field north of Richmond, Grant planned a rapid, surprise maneuver by which he intended to capture the railroads south of Richmond and to isolate the city and its defenders.

## *The Petersburg Campaign*

TO PROTECT PETERSBURG FROM ATTACK the Confederate Government in 1862–63 surrounded the city on the east, south, and west with a chain of 55 earthwork batteries connected by infantry parapets. Against these fortifications, on June 15, 1864, Grant hurled a force of 18,000 men. The Confederate defenders, numbering less than 4,000, offered stout resistance, but by night the Federals had captured more than a mile of their line on the east side of Petersburg. Beauregard, who was in command of the defense, called upon Lee for help. In the meantime, the reinforcements he was able to rush from north of the Appomattox were barely able to check, on June 15 and 16, the charges of the ever-increasing number of Federals. During the night of June 17, Beauregard withdrew his hard-pressed troops to a new line nearer Petersburg, where next day Lee’s veterans were hurried into position in time to repulse a Federal attack 55,000 strong.

The plan to capture Petersburg by surprise had failed with a loss of 10,000 men, and again confronted with Lee’s entrenched army, Grant settled down to regular siege operations. At the same time he began a series of movements to encircle the city for the purpose of cutting the railroads and highways. During nearly 10 months there were six of these extension movements, each involving a major battle, and, despite reverses, Grant’s plan was steadily carried out.

## THE BATTLE OF THE CRATER

East of Petersburg, where the two armies bombarded one another almost continuously from heavy forts and batteries, the opposing trenches in many places were very close together, and here each side made repeated attempts to blow up the other with mines. Before the end of the siege some sectors of this front were honeycombed with magazines, tunnels, and listening galleries. In most instances these mining operations were of little importance, but on July 30, 1864, the Federals succeeded in destroying a whole Confederate battery, and the explosion began a fierce engagement, which has since become known as the Battle of the Crater.

Starting June 25, a Pennsylvania regiment, composed chiefly of coal miners, dug a tunnel 511 feet in length and placed a 4-ton charge of powder beneath Pegram's Confederate battery. It was hoped that the explosion would destroy the battery and make a gap in the line through which the Federals could rush columns to take Petersburg. Careful plans were made by the Federals, and 40,000 men were assembled for the attack, but at the time of the explosion improper execution of orders and confusion caused the venture to fail. In order to weaken the defense, an attack was made on the Confederate lines southeast of Richmond 2 days before the mine was to be exploded. As Grant expected, Lee rushed the greater part of his forces north of the James, which left less than 20,000 men for the protection of Petersburg.

At 3:30 a. m., July 30, the mine fuse was lighted. Troops were massed for the charge. There was a breathless moment of waiting, a moment which seemed like eternity. Every ear was strained for the blast of the explosion. Each soldier was tense. But the silence remained unbroken. The fuse had gone out. Then followed a restless hour of delay which demoralized the waiting troops. At 4:15 two volunteers crawled into the tunnel and relighted the burned-out fuse. Half an hour later there was a terrific blast. Where the Confederate battery had been a moment before, there was now a great hole 150 feet long, 97 feet wide, and 30 feet deep. Nearly 300 men were killed in the explosion. The Confederates were stunned, and had the Federals struck at once, the attack might have succeeded. But the leading Federal division was disorganized by the upheaval and delayed 10 minutes before advancing. Failure to prepare troop



*Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, who held the Federals in check at Petersburg until Lee arrived. Courtesy Signal Corps, U. S. Army.*





*One of the Federal batteries that bombarded Petersburg for nearly 10 months. Courtesy Signal Corps, U. S. Army.*

passages through their own defenses caused further confusion in the Union ranks. As the first charge reached the Confederate line, the troops piled into the crater made by the explosion and halting there blocked the advance of supporting troops. Meanwhile, the Confederates had quickly recovered from their initial surprise and delivered a brisk musketry fire from three sides on the tangled mass of the attacking force.

Federal reinforcements were unable to get past their own comrades who filled the breach, but they did succeed in capturing portions of the line on either side of the crater. By this time the open ground in front of the Federal attacking columns and the ground between them and their own lines were swept by the Confederate artillery and rifle fire which made it impossible for the Union soldiers to advance further or to retreat. Federal batteries hurled over 70 tons of shot and shell in an

effort to silence the Confederate guns. By 8 o'clock nearly 15,000 Northern troops were jammed into a quarter of a mile of captured line. The last of Grant's forces to go into action was a Negro division of 4,200 men. In the face of heavy fire these troops captured a portion of the line north of the Crater and then began to reform for an advance.

Meanwhile, Lee had ordered up all available men from the lines south of Petersburg. The first of these reinforcements, 800 Virginians, arrived at the moment the Federals began their charge. Instantly the Virginians countercharged and rushing forward with a close range volley and fixed bayonets routed the Northern troops, some of whom fled to their own lines, while others crowded in with the mass of men already in the Crater. The Confederates continued to fight desperately through the rest of the morning and the early afternoon, and by 2 o'clock they had recaptured their line and forced the Federals remaining in the Crater to surrender. This failure cost Grant more than 4,000 men.

In June the Federals attempted to capture the highways and railroads south of Petersburg, but were driven back with heavy losses. In August they renewed their encircling movement, and after severe fighting at Globe Tavern, August 18-21, they cut the Weldon Railroad (now the Atlantic Coast Line) and for several days proceeded to destroy the tracks southward. On August 25, however, the Confederates attacked at Ream's Station, drove the Federals off, and halted temporarily the destruction of the road. But in December the Federals completely broke up this line south to Hicksford (now Emporia), Va. From then on the Confederates had to make a 40-mile wagon haul to bring supplies from Hicksford to Petersburg, and only one railroad, the South Side, into Petersburg from the south was left in Confederate possession. The Richmond and Lynchburg continued operating into Richmond throughout the war, as did the Petersburg and Richmond line; but very few supplies, except guns and ammunition, were hauled between Richmond and Petersburg after August 1864.

Simultaneously with the activity along the Weldon Railroad, Grant was directing double-fisted offensives against Lee. Intermittent drives were continued on the Confederate fortifications between Petersburg and Richmond, and on September 29, 1864, the Federals captured Fort Harrison, one of the Confederates' strongholds north of the James River. Grant then extended his line in that region to a length of 7 miles, facing Richmond. At the same time, September 29-30, at Peebles' Farm, south of Petersburg, the Confederates were driven off. The Federal line was extended 2½ miles westward beyond the Weldon Railroad and was fortified by Forts Fisher, Welch, and a number of other heavy earthworks.

In lengthening the Federal lines Grant seldom weakened one part to strengthen another. A large reserve made it possible to expand both flanks, while keeping the front strongly manned. The Confederates had the advantage of fighting on the defensive, but they were compelled to defend more and more miles of trenches with an army that was slowly but surely dwindling. Men were forced to remain on active duty continuously without relief. None but the sick, wounded, or dead were taken out of the front lines.

On October 27, a new Federal drive to the southwest was hurled back by the Confederates at Burgess' Mill, on the Boydton Plank Road south of Hatcher's Run. At the same time an attack on the Richmond defenses, near the 1862 battlefield of Fair Oaks, was also repulsed by them. Both encounters, although Confederate victories, further stretched and thinned the already dangerously slender gray line.

*Trenches used by the Confederates in the defense of Petersburg. Note the use of rolls of wickerwork, or gabions, to line the sides of the trenches. Courtesy Signal Corps, U. S. Army.*







*Panoramic view of*

### WINTER OF 1864-65

In November, December, and January there were no military actions of great importance around Petersburg. The Confederates, in an attempt to conserve their small food supply, sent most of their cavalry into the Carolinas. Federal activities were confined principally to minor operations. There were infantry skirmishes, continued bombardment of Petersburg with heavy siege guns, and on his daily tour of duty at the front each Federal soldier fired his required 60 rounds of ammunition toward the Confederate lines. Thousands of these Minie balls were collected by the Confederates, remolded, and fired back.

Through the winter, reports came in continuously to Federal headquarters that the Boydton Plank Road was being used by a constant stream of supply wagons. The wagons, reputedly, were being used to replace the ruined Weldon Railroad. Accordingly, two corps (about 30,000 men), on







er as it is today.



February 5, 1864, moved out to the Boydton Plank Road to break up this traffic. The road was found to be little used and the troops fell back, though at the time the Federal entrenchments were extended to Hatcher's Run at a point about 3 miles southeast of Burgess' Mill.

This new extension was a menace to Lee's last remaining railroad, the South Side, and Lee was again compelled to push his intrenchments 3 miles farther. By March 1, 1865, the front held by the Army of Northern Virginia, from White Oak Swamp, a few miles southeast of Richmond, to the Claiborne Road, about 8 miles southwest of Petersburg, was 37 miles in length, or twice as long as it had been the preceding June. To guard this line, Lee had 46,000 weary men, a number considerably less than he had mustered at the beginning of the siege. On the other hand, Grant was ready to open his spring campaign with an army entirely rebuilt during the winter. On March 1, he had a trained force of 120,000 men.

## ASSAULT ON FORT STEDMAN

In March 1865, Grant was slowly, but surely, tightening the ring of bayonets around Petersburg, and the plight of the Army of Northern Virginia was fast becoming desperate. With his men already barefooted, ragged, and hungry, Lee faced certain defeat if he permitted himself to be shut up within the city. As a last resort, he prepared to take a large part of his army southward to combine with Johnston in an effort to defeat Sherman, who was marching north through the Carolinas. If they were victorious, the united armies would return to attack Grant. The success of this plan would depend on a rapid maneuver, which, however, would not be possible until the roads were free of winter mud. In the meantime, Grant might complete the envelopment of Petersburg and thereby force the surrender of the

Southern Army. To prevent this eventuality, Lee determined to try to drive a wedge through the Federal line east of the city. If he were able to divide the Northern Army and sever its communications, he might compel Grant to draw in his far-flung lines. To plan and execute the move he assigned Gen. John B. Gordon.

Very quietly on the night of March 24, Gordon assembled every available man, half the Confederate Army, in the trenches opposite Fort Stedman, where he planned to strike the Federal line. Before dawn next morning, the signal for the attack was given. Pickets, who had crept stealthily forward, pounced on the Federal outposts and silenced them. Fifty men with axes chopped down the barricades in front of Fort Stedman. Swarming into the Federal stronghold, they overcame its defenders in a brief hand-to-hand struggle. Then, three companies of 100 picked men each swept forward to seize what they thought were

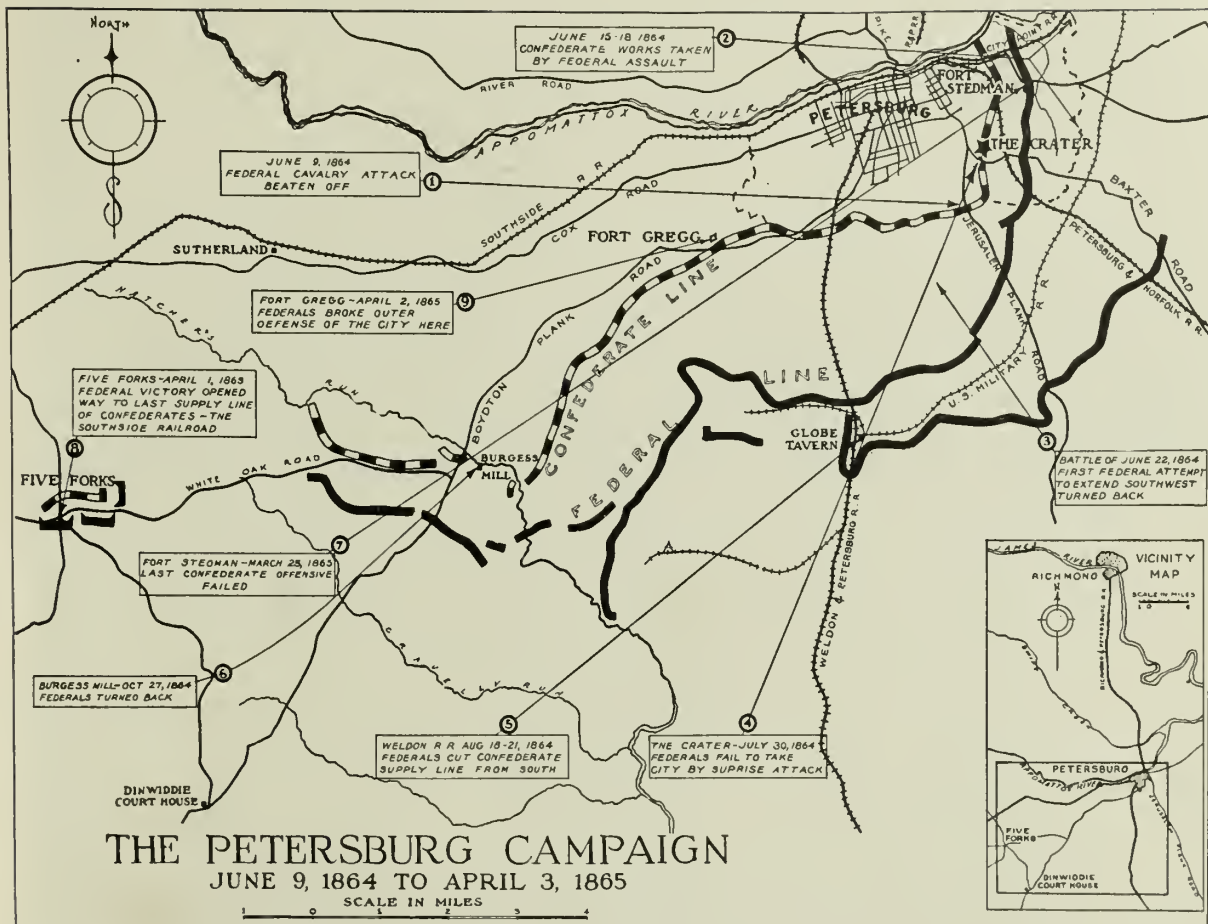
*The "Dictator," a huge seacoast mortar used by the Federals in the bombardment of Petersburg. From a Brady photograph—courtesy Library of Congress.*



*Replica of the "Dictator," constructed by the National Park Service at Petersburg National Military Park.*







three forts in the rear of the Federal lines. Meanwhile, Gordon charged through the breach, and his troops fanned out to the right and to the left. Up to this point the Confederate plan was working magnificently, but final success depended on the capture of the three rear forts, which would give the Southerners command of the eastern sector. The advance parties now reported that they could not find these forts, and with good reason, for they did not exist. Gordon had based his strategy on a mistaken assumption. The error was to prove costly.

The initial momentum of the charge had carried the Confederates a quarter of a mile beyond Fort Stedman, but there the attack slowed down and stopped. The Federals had recovered from

surprise and were rushing reinforcements to their broken line. Fort Haskell and Battery Nine on the flanks of the gap turned back successive charges and poured an enfilading fire into the captured sector. As dawn revealed the target, other Federal batteries joined in the terrific bombardment. At 8 o'clock, Lee realized that the attack had failed and ordered a withdrawal. Almost at the same time the Federals counterattacked, forcing the Confederates back. In the retreat the gray ranks suffered severely from the shelling of 40 cannon and mortars. Nearly 2,000 Confederates, reluctant to return through the heavy shell fire, allowed themselves to be captured. In all, Lee lost more than 4,000 men. Thus ended the last important offensive of the Army of Northern Virginia.



*Skipwith's Creek (Harrison's Creek) in Petersburg National Military Park, where the assault on Fort Stedman was checked by the Federals on March 25, 1865.*

#### DINWIDDIE COURTHOUSE AND FIVE FORKS

Grant now feared that any morning the Federal Army might wake to find that the Confederates had left Petersburg. To prevent this, he took quick action. Immediately after the battle of Fort Stedman, he sent a large body of troops to the southwest of Petersburg to attempt a knockout blow by cutting the South Side Railroad, Lee's last supply line. To insure the success of this move, 50,000 men were used. They included infantry, artillery, and cavalry—more strength than was in the entire Army of Northern Virginia.

To meet this deadly threat, Lee stripped his lines to a perilous degree and hurried about 12,000 infantry and cavalry toward Five Forks, where the Northern cavalry was reported. On March 31, the Federals were driven back to Dinwiddie Courthouse, but the next day, the Confederates were forced to retire to Five Forks, where that evening they were caught between surprise attacks and were routed with a loss of 5,000 men. Southern troops, escaping, fled to Sutherland, on the South Side Railroad, and many of them made their way on to Amelia Courthouse.

This defeat laid the South Side Railroad open to the Federals and compelled Lee to evacuate Petersburg and Richmond at once or be shut up in the two cities by a complete encircling movement by Grant. To have remained would have meant an early surrender through starvation.

#### FINAL ASSAULT AND EVACUATION

Grant knew that a leader of Lee's courage and resourcefulness would not wait for complete investment, but would immediately try to lead his army out of the trap. Therefore, he ordered a general assault on Petersburg for the morning of April 2. Simultaneously, the Federal forces at Five Forks were to drive across the South Side Railroad. The attack took place on a front of several miles, and by night, in spite of heroic resistance at Fort Gregg and numerous other points, the Confederate outer line was taken. As darkness put an end to the fighting, the Federal Army posted its pickets, confident that the next day would put them in the city.

At 8 o'clock on this same night, the Confederates began to withdraw from Petersburg. They crossed the Appomattox, destroyed bridges behind them, and proceeded by two roads toward Amelia Courthouse, where they were joined by the troops from Richmond. Lee hoped by fast marching to elude Grant and to combine forces with Johnston in North Carolina. Grant made no direct pursuit, but ordered both cavalry and infantry to hurry westward by roads south of the Appomattox in an attempt to intercept the Southern Army. At Appomattox Courthouse the Federals overtook the Confederates and blocked the way to North Carolina. The end had come at last, and here on April 9, 1865, Lee surrendered.

During the 10 months' fighting around Petersburg, the Federals lost approximately 42,000 men, while the Confederate losses totaled more than 25,000.





152 N.Y. 1865

# THE FALL OF RICHMOND, VA. ON THE NIGHT OF APRIL 2nd 1865.

From the Currier and Ives lithograph, "The Fall of Richmond, Va., on the night of April 2d, 1865." Courtesy Confederate Museum, Richmond, Va.



## *The Park*

Petersburg National Military Park was established by act of Congress, approved July 3, 1926. Since that date the main portions of the battlefield and the principal fortifications surrounding the city have been acquired by gift and purchase, and now embrace 2,047 acres. The park was formally dedicated June 20, 1932, and remained under the jurisdiction of the War Department until 1933 when it was transferred to the Department of the Interior to be administered by the National Park Service.

Three miles south of Petersburg on State Route No. 675 is the Poplar Grove National Cemetery established in 1866, which contains the graves of 6,260 Federal and Confederate soldiers, 4,107 of whom are unknown.

*Battery No. 5 in the Union line at Petersburg as it appears today.*

## HOW TO REACH THE PARK

Petersburg, 22 miles south of Richmond, Va., is on U. S. Highways 1, 301, and 460 and may be reached by railroad or bus. The main portion of Petersburg National Military Park lies immediately east of the city and west of Camp Lee. Park entrances are on State Highway 36 and U. S. Highways 460 and 301. Visitors may reach these entrances by city busses which run on an hourly schedule.

*Section of the parapet and ditch at Federal Battery No. 5.*





## FACILITIES

For the visitors' convenience and information, the park offers the following facilities: Extensive drives, narrative markers, maps, and other exhibits, information stations where literature and guides are obtainable, field museums at Battery 5 and the Crater, and picnic areas at Battery 8 and Soldiers Spring.

## RULES AND REGULATIONS

*Fires.*—No fires shall be kindled except in fire-places located at picnic grounds. These fires must be extinguished before leaving. Be sure cigarettes and matches are put out before disposal.

*Camps.*—No camping is permitted within the park.

*Trees, flowers, and animals.*—Trees and shrubs must not be cut or broken. Flowers must not be picked. Birds and animals must not be molested. The injury or defacement of any park feature is prohibited.

*Firearms.*—Neither hunting nor the possession of firearms in the park is permitted.

*Refuse.*—Do not throw paper, lunch refuse, or other trash on the roads, trails, or elsewhere. Deposit all such debris in the receptacles provided for the purpose.

*Automobiles.*—Drive carefully at all times. Obey the park speed limit and other automobile regulations.

*Disorderly conduct.*—Persons who render themselves obnoxious by disorderly conduct or bad behavior are subject to penalties.

*Accidents.*—Accidents of whatever nature shall be reported as soon as possible to the superintendent.

## ADMINISTRATION

The Petersburg National Military Park is administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. Park headquarters is located temporarily in the Post Office Building in Petersburg. Permanent headquarters will be in the Center Hill Mansion, an ante bellum southern residence, which is now being repaired. Center Hill, which will also serve as a museum, will be reached by an entrance on Franklin Street, one block east of the post office.

Suggestions, complaints, or requests for additional information should be addressed to the Superintendent, Petersburg National Military Park, Petersburg, Va.



*The Massachusetts Monument at the entrance to the Crater.*



*Contact station at entrance to Battery No. 5.*

CAMP LEE



ARROWS INDICATE ROUTE  
★ STARS INDICATE FORTS, BATTERIES & THE CRATER